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CROESUS' SECOND REPRIEVE AND OTHER TALES OF THE PERSIAN COURT¹

The wrath of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain. (Proverbs 16.14–15)

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

Very much of Herodotus Book 3 might be read as evidence of perverse folly on the part of the Persian conspirators in opting to continue with monarchy when they had the opportunity for radical change (3.80–2).² Otanes, the leading spirit (according to Herodotus 68.2) in the plot and the champion of democracy in the Constitutional Debate, clearly hit an important nail on the head when he drew attention to the lack of any control on the ruler's power (80.2): *εἶδετε μὲν γὰρ τὴν Καμβύσῃ ὕβριν ἐπ' ὅσον ἐπεξήλθε, μετεσχήκατε δὲ καὶ τῆς τοῦ μάγου ὕβριος. κὼς δ' ἂν εἴη χρῆμα κατηρητημένον μουναρχίᾳ, τῇ ἐξεστι ἀνευθύνῳ ποιέειν τὰ βούλεται;*

The narrative appeal of absolutism is unquestionable; the ruler makes quick decisions and his word is law. Democratic procedures normally involve consultation and delay; they do not produce an economical storyline, and if we aim to construct a gripping narrative out of the deliberations of boards and committees, we focus on the policies and tactics of one or two key figures. Tales of rulers in whose hands lies the power of life and death provide satisfying entertainment when they begin 'Once upon a time' or at any rate are set at a safe distance in the past; when they concern the less accessible regions of the modern world they inspire a mixture of fascinated horror and appreciation of our own good fortune. So, no doubt, it was with Herodotus' audience.³

Herodotus' narrative of Near Eastern history unfolds through kings, and the isolated omnipotence regarded as characteristic of Oriental despotism is displayed from various angles. We, however, are bound to ask how far such stories may be trusted. Just what may we learn from them about the events to which they relate? What are we to make of the memorable narratives concerning the relationship between the Great King and his immediate circle? When we have stripped off what we regard as gross improbabilities are we left with a substratum of Achaemenid reality? If these stories contribute nothing to political or military history, might they nevertheless throw light on the mentality, manners, and customs of the Iranian nobility? Or do Hellenic misconception and fantasy (perhaps in themselves inconsistent) outweigh

¹ This article is heavily indebted to a seminar on the Bisitun inscription given by David Lewis in 1989; I would like to dedicate it to his memory.

I am grateful to Tim Rood and Christopher Tuplin for several helpful suggestions.

² Hereafter no book number will be given in references to Book 3. The study of this part of Herodotus' work has benefited enormously from the late David Asheri's splendid commentary (*Erodoto, Le Storie, Libro iii: La Persia* [Rome, 1990]), and every such reference might be accompanied by the recommendation to consult his note ad loc.

³ Cf. Charles Segal, *Oedipus Tyrannus: Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge* (New York, 2001), 3: 'Stories of kings are themselves exemplary of the extreme limits of human criminality and human grandeur.' See also, for a rather different perspective, K. Ranke (ed.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 8.1 (Berlin, 1994), s.v. *König, Königin*, 134–48, esp. 144–6 (Lutz Röhrich).

occasional correspondence with other evidence? Of the latter we have rather more for this part of Herodotus' work than we usually enjoy.

In his well-known discussion of Herodotus' 'Persergeschichten', Reinhardt adverted to the different approaches of historians and of scholars whose interests are primarily literary:

In die bisherige Erklärung der Persergeschichten haben Philologen und Historiker sich geteilt. Wenn den Historikern mehr um ihren Gehalt an schließlich doch geschichtlicher Realität zu tun war, so ging es den Philologen mehr um ihre Form, gleichviel, ob diese mehr in einzelnen volkstümlichen Motiven oder mehr in einer geistigen Gesamtform Herodots enthalten schien.⁴

Herodotean scholarship constantly suffers from a failure to unite the different interests of these two groups. But even if our concern is primarily with Herodotus' narrative technique, we must acknowledge that many of his stories owe much of their power to our belief in their basic historicity.

It would be a hopeless task to establish useful guidelines for assessing Herodotus' reliability, but it should be recognized that some of our problems arise from the air of confidence inherent in his authorial persona. This is no doubt essential to a successful storyteller; expressions of doubt as to minor details may enhance our belief in the tale as a whole, but the technique required is that of the journalist or historical novelist rather than that of the systematic researcher. Herodotus risks being judged by the standards appropriate to the latter because of the sharp criticism to which at times he subjects the views of other intellectuals.⁵

Much that Herodotus retails has an anecdotal look to it. It is unhelpful to classify such material simply as 'folktales'; these are not narratives that hold an appeal only (or at least primarily) to the illiterate or are relevant only to a particular ethnic group.⁶ But orality is of their essence; they are like modern stories of absent-minded scholars and authoritarian conductors which circulate in conversation and are taken to be true (even if trivial) until someone points out that a story concerning, for example, Sir Thomas Beecham in Britain features Herbert von Karajan when told in Germany. The serious biographer will be cautious in his use of such material where first-hand testimony is lacking. It would be unreasonable to find fault with Herodotus for being less rigorously selective, but his work lends such stories a new significance as they are integrated in a

⁴ K. Reinhardt, 'Herodots Persergeschichten' (originally published in 1940) in W. Marg (ed.), *Herodot: eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1962), 320–69 (327). The importance of integrating historical and literary approaches to Herodotus is well emphasized by J. L. Moles, 'Truth and untruth in Herodotus and Thucydides' in C. Gill and T. P. Wiseman (edd.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Exeter, 1993), 88–121.

⁵ The point is very well made, apropos of Herodotus' miscalculations of Persian tribute and related matters, by W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage u. Novelle bei Herodot u. seinen Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1921, repr. 1969), 75: 'An seinem guten Willen zu zweifeln haben wir nicht den geringsten Grund. Er konnte es nicht besser. Eher möchte man daran zweifeln, ob er wirklich der geborene Forscher ist, der er sich zu sein einbildete, wenn er so schneidige Kritik an den wissenschaftlichen Ansichten anderer übte. . . . Die zahlreichen Angriffe, die das Werk in der Folgezeit erduldet hat, sind vielleicht unverschuldet, aber nicht unbegründet.' The remarkable combativeness of the contemporary intellectual environment and Herodotus' affinities with the discourse of scientists and sophists are well explored by Rosalind Thomas, *Herodotus in Context* (Cambridge, 2000). We ought perhaps in Herodotus' case to resist with more determination the identification of author and narrator which we generally take for granted in reading historical texts; see further Tim Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation* (Oxford, 1998), 10.

⁶ Equivocation and vagueness in the use of the term (as with 'oral tradition') have frequently generated confusion; it is much too often assumed that the meaning of such expressions is self-evident. *Märchen* is equally problematic, though for different reasons.

larger historical context. This should not be supposed to increase their intrinsic value as historical evidence. In particular, we should be very careful about the use we make of details if we are persuaded that the story as a whole is unhistorical. We do well to bear in mind Lewis's warning:

If you start with the postulate that you should use no Herodotus unless he can be shown to be right, you just won't get very far. That would be an inconvenient line, but not intellectually disreputable. It would be more disreputable to get caught, say, in the position of saying that Herodotus' account of Babylon is factually wrong, but must nevertheless be atmospherically accurate.⁷

I shall here discuss three stories the truth of which must be of some concern to the serious historian, and which clearly involve what are perhaps best designated migratory motifs, forming the basis of stories retold in other contexts (and to make different points).

CROESUS AT CAMBYSES' COURT

No Near Eastern source known to us throws direct light on the end of independent Lydia and Croesus' fate.⁸ Although it was long thought that an entry in the *Chronicle of Nabonidus*⁹ for 547 referred to the conquest of Lydia and the death of its king, this interpretation appears to be no longer accepted.¹⁰ But we have a remarkable illustration of the impression that Croesus' end made on the Greek world in a famous, much reproduced depiction of the king seated on a magnificent funeral pyre, on a red-figure amphora by Myson, dated c. 490, now in the Louvre.¹¹ Croesus' name is given, so that there can be no doubt about the identification; robed and garlanded, he holds a libation vessel, and looks calm and contented. A servant, labelled ΕΥΘΥΜΟΣ, is about to set light to the pyre. Such a historical scene is most unusual

⁷ D. M. Lewis, 'Persians in Herodotus', in *The Greek Historians: Literature and History: Papers Presented to A. E. Raubitschek* (Stanford, 1985), 104.

⁸ My discussion is heavily indebted to Walter Burkert, 'Das Ende des Kroisos: Vorstufen einer herodoteischen Geschichtserzählung', *Catalepton. Festschrift f. Bernhard Wyss* (Basle, 1985), 4–15; see also D. Fehling, *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art* (Leeds, 1989), 206–7. It is a pity that Burkert's paper is ignored in the treatment of the conquest of Lydia offered in two recent works likely to enjoy a wide influence: Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East 2* (London, 1995), 658; Pierre Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse de Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris, 1996), 46.

⁹ *ANET* 305–7.

¹⁰ See further J. Cargill, 'The Nabonidus Chronicle and the fall of Lydia: consensus with feet of clay', *AJAH* 2 (1977), 97–116. However, even if 547 may be a year or so too early, this traditional date cannot be far out. Eusebius' *Chronicle*, preserved in an Armenian translation, concludes its Lydian king list with the note that 'Krisos [*sic*] wurde getötet durch Kyros, der die Lyderherrschaft beseitigte' (Josef Karst, *Eusebius Werke 5: die Chronik aus dem armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Kommentar* [Leipzig, 1911], 11). Eusebius is known to have drawn on Berossus, and thus indirectly to have exploited Near Eastern sources; but nervousness about the distortion produced by successive translations seems to have made scholars wary of testimony in direct contradiction to Herodotus, and this item of evidence is often simply ignored.

¹¹ See P. E. Arias, B. B. Shefton, and M. Hirmer, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London, 1962), no. 131; Sir John Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases* (London, 1989), no. 171. On the other side is depicted Theseus' abduction of Antiope: on the significance of this juxtaposition, see Boardman in D. Kurtz and B. Sparkes (edd.), *The Eye of Greece: Studies in the Art of Athens* (Cambridge, 1982), 15–16.

in Greek vase painting; in all probability the fate of the Lydian king had been given contemporary relevance by the Ionian Revolt.¹²

By way of exegesis we have Bacchylides, *Ode* 3, composed in 468, to celebrate Hiero's victory in the chariot race at the Olympic Games.¹³ Like the vase painter, Bacchylides does something most unusual in taking the subject of his myth from the recent past. When Sardis fell to the Persians, he tells us (3.22–62), the king did not wait to suffer slavery, but within the precincts of his palace had a great pyre heaped up, and then mounted it along with his wife and daughters. But Apollo responded to his appeal, and while Zeus quenched the pyre with a sudden cloudburst, transported Croesus and his daughters to the Hyperboreans' earthly paradise, δι' εὐσέβειαν ὅτι μέγιστα θνατῶν ἐς ἀγαθέαν ἀνέπεμψε Πυθῶ. In this paranormal rescue the demarcation of functions should be noted. Zeus acts in his regular role as controller of the weather; the really miraculous element, which Bacchylides underlines as such (ἄπιστον οὐδέν, ὅτι θεῶν μέριμνα τεύχει), comes with Apollo's intervention. Piety finds its reward; a story of catastrophe is transposed and given an ending beyond all expectation. The myth shows how, in the face of death, Apollo looks after his own. To Hiero, who died the following year and was already seriously ill in 470 when Pindar composed *Pythian* 1, the message had a peculiar relevance.

For us, the conclusion should be clear; after Croesus mounted the funeral pyre, no one saw him again. There are many Near Eastern parallels for a ruler's self-immolation by fire when faced with defeat. Thus in ninth-century Israel 'it came to pass, when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died' (1 Kings 16.18). Similarly the pirate chief Zenicetus, when his Lycian stronghold was captured by Servilius Isauricus, ἐνέπηρσεν ἑαυτὸν πανοίκιον (Strabo 14.671). We may also compare Herodotus' account of the death of Hamilcar at Himera (7.167), where the detail ἐπισπένδων well parallels the libation vessel that Croesus holds in Myson's vase painting, and of the end of the Persian Bages at Eion in 477 (7.107, cf. 113; Thuc. 1.98.1).¹⁴ It makes good sense to suppose that Croesus chose this course when Persian victory seemed certain, that he did not wait to see whether the victor's mercy might extend to a ruler who had waged aggressive war against Persia.¹⁵ This is the tradition that impressed Myson; whether he knew of Apollo's intervention or whether that represents a later development in the saga we cannot tell.

This is not, of course, the story that Herodotus tells (1.86–7). His account apparently modifies Bacchylides' narrative to remove the really miraculous element,

¹² See further Tonio Hölscher, *Griechische Historienbilder des 5. u. 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Würzburg, 1973), 30–1.

¹³ See further G. O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Commentary on Selected Larger Pieces* (Oxford, 2001), 321–58 (with a very full bibliography).

¹⁴ Cf. Ctesias' description (*FGH* 688 F 1.27) of Sardanapallus' self-incineration (perhaps derived from the fiery death of Shamash-shum-ukin in 648, after the failure of his revolt against his brother Ashurbanipal); C. Tuplin notes a curious Achaemenid period text, in Aramaic but written in Demotic script, evidently based on this episode, though Ashurbanipal and Shamaash-shum-ukin are well disguised as Sarbanabal and Sarmuge: see further C. F. Nims and R. C. Steiner, 'Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin: a tale of two brothers from the Aramaic text in Demotic script', *RBI* 92 (1985), 60–81. Dido's death as Timaeus tells the story (*FGH* 566 F 82) might be added to the list. Similar principles are involved in the action of the Lycians of Xanthus when defeated by the Persians (Hdt. 1.176); for a Western example (Astapa), see Livy 28.22–3 (I owe this reference to Marco Dorati).

¹⁵ The case of the defeated Psammenitus, as Herodotus describes it (15.1), is quite different; he had merely resisted Persian invasion.

translation under Apollo's auspices to the happy Hyperboreans.¹⁶ Croesus' 'escape' now results from purely natural factors, Cyrus' response to Solon's teaching, and a sudden change in the weather following Croesus' appeal to Apollo. But this more realistic outcome entails alteration earlier in the narrative. There would be an effect of bathos if the king, having heroically determined on death, after all descended from his funeral pyre, his memorable suicide frustrated by a sudden deterioration in weather conditions. His escape calls for another to pronounce the death sentence, and this role falls to the victor, Cyrus. Herodotus leaves his motive uncertain (1.86.2 *ἐν νόῳ ἔχων εἴτε δὴ ἀκροθίνια ταῦτα καταγιεῖν θεῶν ὅτεωι δὴ, εἴτε καὶ εὐχὴν ἐπιτελέσαι θέλων, εἴτε καὶ πυθόμενος τὸν Κροῖσον εἶναι θεοσεβέα τοῦδε εἵνεκεν ἀνεβίβασε ἐπὶ τὴν πυρὴν, βουλόμενος εἰδέναι εἴ τίς μιν δαιμόνων ῥύσεται τοῦ μὴ ζῶντα κατακαυθῆναι*). The third suggestion corresponds to the sequel, but this extraordinarily cruel experiment is hardly consistent with the generally favourable presentation of Cyrus;¹⁷ it has the air of being devised in the light of the outcome. But the alternative explanations raise difficulties when Cyrus changes his mind; he ought not thus to abandon a project undertaken in honour of the gods, without at least promising to offer an equivalent or more valuable substitute; Herodotus does not really believe in these alternatives. Nor does the process that leads to Cyrus' change of heart stand up to serious scrutiny.

Solon and Delphi, Apollo's oracle, are the twin pillars on which Herodotus' narrative of Croesus rests; here they unite to form an over-arching unity of immense literary power. But if we treat it as more likely to preserve genuine history than Bacchylides' victory ode we have misconceived the relationship between the two. *πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἄνθρωποι*, according to Herodotus' hero Solon (F29). Herodotus has tried to reconstruct what *really* happened on the basis of Bacchylides' poem. That version of events must have had the approval of Delphi; the oracle had good reason to feel uneasy about the downfall of a conspicuous benefactor, whom it had apparently encouraged to embark on a war that ended disastrously. The myth of translation to an earthly paradise provided a fine *apologia*. Herodotus' rationalization leaves the theological element central; in the god's timely response to the pious king's prayer we see the sort of miracle that the fifth-century enlightenment could accept, which indeed reinforced faith in Delphi and its god.

This is a long preamble, but I hope establishes the strength of the case for believing that the king did not survive the Persian conquest of Lydia. Herodotus should not be supposed responsible for the extension of his life by twenty years beyond the fall of Sardis. It makes better sense to see in the development of Croesus' legend the fascination exercised on the Greek imagination by the last of the fabulously wealthy Lydian kings. Rumours that a greatly loved or admired figure, commonly believed to be dead, has really survived (as with Nero, Hitler, and Elvis Presley¹⁸) can gain in solidity with the passage of time.¹⁹ If we are reluctant to jettison Herodotus' reference

¹⁶ Although Herodotus does not believe the far north to be habitable (4.31.2), he is reluctant to question the reality of the Hyperboreans (4.32–6).

¹⁷ Nor, as was noted in antiquity, is it easily reconciled with Zoroastrian reverence for fire: see Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrH* 90 F 68.12).

¹⁸ For Nero, see Miriam Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984), 15, 214–15; for Hitler, Anton Joachimsthaler, *The Last Days of Hitler*, trans. Helmut Böglér (London, 1996), 26–34.

¹⁹ Axel Olrik offers an excellent example in connection with the death of Olaf Trygvason in the battle of Svold; a poem commemorating the king recorded that a rumour of his survival had proved untrue, but 200 years later *Olafs Saga* narrated his escape and further adventures in

to Lydian tradition (1.87.1 *ἐνθαῦτα λέγεται ὑπὸ Λυδῶν κτλ.*),²⁰ it fits that picture well. As a pensioner at the Persian court the ex-king could be imagined exerting a quietly civilizing influence on the new regime; it was in no one's interest to discourage this notion. The circulation of such tales no doubt convinced Herodotus that Croesus must have survived the sack of Sardis.²¹ To us the stories relating to his time as a Persian courtier seem so obviously anticlimactic that they receive relatively little attention. But they certainly offer some instructive insights into Herodotus' approach.²² I am concerned here with Croesus' last appearance.

We first see Croesus in Cambyzes' entourage when the Persian conqueror subjects the defeated Pharaoh Psammenitus to a cruel psychological test, which, we are apparently meant to infer, forcefully reminds Croesus of his own fall (14.11). We might feel some surprise that he continues to enjoy an honourable status at court, given the disastrous outcome of the advice that he had offered Cyrus (1.207–14), but, as if he were an elderly member of the family, no explanation of his presence is thought necessary.

We are thus prepared for his reappearance in the nightmarish sequence of events illustrating Cambyzes' insanity after his assault on the Apis bull (30.1).²³ In this confrontation between two non-Greeks, Croesus, as the inheritor of Solon's wisdom, represents a semi-Hellenic standpoint, his frankness sharply contrasted with the other courtiers' servile sycophancy. We see him here in the well-established Herodotean role of the wise counsellor, disregard for whose advice prepares us for trouble to come.²⁴ Encouraged by Cambyzes' favourable reception of his frank speech contrasted with the

Wendland, Russia, and the Holy Land; see further Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, trans. Kirsten Wolf and Jody Jensen (Bloomington, 1992), 1–2.

²⁰ But we should compare other passages where foreign traditions are cited for what appear to be rationalizations of narratives which we know to have been treated in a distinctive manner by the lyric poets: 2.54 (Egyptian [Theban] tradition on the foundation of Dodona, cf. Pindar F58; 2.112–20 (Egyptian [Memphite] tradition on Helen in Egypt, cf. Stesichorus PMG 192–3).

²¹ 'Die seltsame und nicht immer glückliche Art, in der in späteren Kapiteln der überlebende Kroisos eingeführt ist, erklärt sich am ehesten, wenn Herodot nicht ganz assimilierte Berichte wiedergibt' (Burkert [n. 8], 14). The implications of allowing too much scope for Herodotus' own initiative here are nicely exposed by Sir John Boardman's comment (*Persia and the West* [London, 2000], 231): 'If Herodotus could add some twenty years to Croesus' life barely a century before he was writing, and simply in the interests of introducing dramatic comment, it reflects interestingly on his value as a historian of events.'

²² See further M. Miller, 'The Herodotean Croesus', *Klio* 41 (1963), 58–94, esp. 67–72; K. von Fritz, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* 1 (Berlin, 1967), 231–9.

²³ The limitations of Herodotus' information regarding Persian history are indicated by the restriction of his account of Cambyzes to the period after the conquest of Egypt when the empire was ruled from Memphis. We do not know how long the process of subjugation took, though analogy with the Arab conquest c. 640 would favour a period of some months, nor when the Egyptian forces finally capitulated; spring 525 has come to be accepted, but a date in 526 cannot be excluded: see further L. Depuydt, 'Egyptian regnal dating under Cambyzes and the date of the Persian conquest', in P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of W. K. Simpson* 1 (Boston, 1996), 179–90. On Herodotus' presentation of Cambyzes, see further L. Hofmann and A. Vorbichler, 'Das Kambysesbild bei Herodot', *AOF* 27 (1980), 86–105; T. S. Brown, 'Herodotus' portrait of Cambyzes', *Historia* 31 (1982), 387–403; A. B. Lloyd, 'Herodotus on Cambyzes: some thoughts on recent work', *AchHist* 3 (Leiden, 1988), 55–66; R. V. Munson, 'The madness of Cambyzes (Hdt. 3.16–38)', *Arethusa* 24 (1991), 43–65; on Cambyzes in Egypt, see J. D. Ray, 'Egypt 525–404 B.C.', *CAH*² 4 (Cambridge, 1988), 254–86; C. Tuplin, *AchHist* 6 (Leiden, 1991), 259–64; E. Yamauchi, 'Cambyzes in Egypt', in J. E. Coleson and V. H. Matthews (edd.), *Go to the land I will show you*. *Studies in Honor of D. Young* (Winona Lake, 1996), 371–92.

²⁴ See further R. Lattimore, 'The wise adviser in Herodotus', *CPh* 34 (1939), 24–35; H. Bischoff, 'Der Warner bei Herodot', in W. Marg (ed.), *Herodot* (Darmstadt, 1962), 302–19.

adulation of others (34.5),²⁵ he takes it upon himself to rebuke the king when Cambyses, in a weird reversal of the motif familiar from the story of William Tell, is moved by psychopathic caprice to kill the son of his most trusted courtier, Prexaspes,²⁶ and concludes his homily with a reminder that Cyrus himself charged him to counsel his son and successor (36.1–2). To offer advice to a king without being asked must surely be regarded as, at least, a risky breach of court etiquette, and Cambyses, not unreasonably, takes a poor view of Croesus' qualifications as a mentor. Although Croesus escapes before Cambyses can shoot him down as he had Prexaspes' son, he is sentenced to execution.²⁷ However, the servants charged with this duty calculate that some delay might be worth their while (36.5):

οἱ δὲ θεράποντες ἐπιστάμενοι τὸν τρόπον αὐτοῦ κατακρύπτουσι τὸν Κροῖσον ἐπὶ τῷδε τῷ λόγῳ ὥστε, εἰ μὲν μεταμελήσῃ τῷ Καμβύσῃ καὶ ἐπιζητήῃ τὸν Κροῖσον, οἱ δὲ ἐκφύγαντες αὐτὸν δῶρα λάμβνουν ζωάγρια Κροῖσου, ἣν δὲ μὴ μεταμέλῃται μηδὲ ποθῇ μιν, τότε καταχράσθαι.

Their expectation that Cambyses might regret the death sentence proves well founded (36.6): ἐπόθησέ τε δὴ ὁ Καμβύσης τὸν Κροῖσον οὐ πολλῶι μετέπειτα χρόνῳ ὕστερον, καὶ οἱ θεράποντες μαθόντες τοῦτο ἐπηγγέλλοντο αὐτῷ ὡς περιείη. But their hope of reward is disappointed: Καμβύσης δὲ Κροῖσῳ μὲν συνήδεσθαι ἔφη περιεόντι, ἐκείνους μέντοι τοὺς περιποιήσαντας οὐ καταπροΐξεσθαι ἀλλ' ἀποκτενεῖν· καὶ ἐποίησε ταῦτα.²⁸

This episode, combining the themes of truthfulness and archery supposedly central to the education of noble Persians (1.136), well illustrates some of the characteristic features of autocracy which Otanes adduces as arguments for democracy in the Constitutional Debate (80.5). The ruler is ἀναρμόστατον δὲ πάντων· ἦν τε γὰρ αὐτὸν μετρίως θαυμάζεις, ἄχθεται ὅτι οὐ κάρτα θεραπεύεται, ἦν τε θεραπεύῃ τις κάρτα, ἄχθεται ἅτε θωπί. Croesus was misled by Cambyses' approval of his frankness contrasted with the other courtiers' unthinking adulation. We also see illustrated Otanes' objection that the ruler kills men without trial: τὰ δὲ δὴ μέγιστα ἔρχομαι ἐρέων· νόμαί τε κινεῖ πάτρια καὶ βιᾶται γυναῖκας κτείνει τε ἀκρίτους. The monarch might himself be expected to appreciate the formalities of judicial

²⁵ We might think that Croesus was sailing rather near the wind in adverting to Cambyses' lack of a son to succeed him; the latter might not have taken kindly a reminder of the assault on his sister/wife by which he brought about the miscarriage of their child (32.4). But this anecdote of Croesus' clever response is meant primarily to serve as a foil to what follows; I do not think that we are meant to infer that Cambyses was too fuddled to find it tactless. We are, however, alerted to the prospect of problems over the succession.

²⁶ Introduced at 30.3, ὃς ἦν οἱ ἀνὴρ Περσέων πιστότατος, and therefore chosen by Cambyses to return to Susa and kill Smerdis. Here his office is more precisely indicated (34.1), τὸν ἐτίμα τε μάλιστα καὶ οἱ τὰς ἀγγελίας ἐσεφόρεε οὗτος (cf. 1.114.2, where Cyrus in allocating duties among his playmates τῷ δέ τινι τὰς ἀγγελίας ἐσφέρειν ἐδίδου γέρας). The tensions of the vizier's position provide themes quite remote from the Greek world; they are highlighted at the start of Herodotus' history of Lydia with the story of Gyges (1.8–12). Remembering the results of Astyages' treatment of Harpagus (1.119), we might expect Prexaspes to plan retaliation as Harpagus does (1.123–4); but Prexaspes remains unswervingly loyal and only after Cambyses' death reveals the truth, which he guarantees by suicide: Πηξάσπης μὲν νυν ἐὼν πάντα χρόνον ἀνὴρ δόκιμος οὕτω ἐτελεύτησε (75.3). His career shows the high cost of loyalty to such a regime. See further Reinhardt (n. 4), 344–7; A. Szabó, 'Herodotea', *AAntHung* 1 (1951/2), 75–89 at 76–80.

²⁷ Such speed in delivering a death sentence is of course inconsistent with Persian procedure as Herodotus represents it elsewhere (1.137.1, cf. 7.194.2).

²⁸ Cf. 8.118.4.

process when expedition in carrying out his orders precludes a reprieve if he changes his mind, a possibility all the more likely since his position makes rash decisions far too easy (80.3): *κῶς δ' ἂν εἴη χρήμα κατηρτημένον μοναρχίῃ, τῇ ἔξῃσιν ἀνευθύνῳ ποιέειν τὰ βούλεται*. We see again the tendency of autocracy to foster deviousness in its servants, already very clearly demonstrated in Harpagus' failure to perform Astyages' instructions that he should kill the infant Cyrus (1.108–10). Here too, as in Harpagus' case (1.117–19), severe punishment follows disobedience to the king's orders, even though he is pleased at the outcome.

But in itself this is not a very satisfactory story. Why, we want to know, did Cambyzes soon come to long (*ἐπόθησε . . . οὐ πολλῶι μετέπειτα χρόνῳ*) for Croesus? Something more is surely indicated than regret that the old man is no longer around to give unwanted advice. Appreciation of Croesus' value as the inheritor of Solon's wisdom demanded an appropriate attitude in his interlocutors; but Hellenic *parrhesia* clearly did not suit the style of Cambyzes' court. Moreover, though the king's criticism of Croesus' poor judgement was unkind (36.3), it was well justified,²⁹ and it is hard to imagine a situation in which he might have been moved to revise his estimate. His change of heart simply suggests infirmity of purpose, and highlights the uncertainties of a way of life dependent on a despot's whim. Our last view of Croesus shows him in a rather unflattering light as he scuttles away from the trigger-happy king to be saved by the servants charged with his execution, not out of respect or affection, but because they calculate that there might be a reward for saving him. 'This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.' The tradition that prolonged his existence after the fall of Sardis offered no alternative to the fiery death of his own seeking befitting a defeated ruler.

A fresh light was cast on this narrative with the discovery, in 1906, in the excavation of the remains of the Jewish garrison at Elephantine,³⁰ of fragments of an Aramaic text of the widely diffused *Story of Ahiqar*, a tale of Assyrian court life set in the reigns of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. This copy, economically recycling papyrus originally used for a commercial document, dates from the latter part of the fifth century.³¹ The

²⁹ At least, if the account of Cyrus' end which Herodotus regards as the most persuasive among many (1.214.5) is accepted.

³⁰ On the Jewish community of Elephantine, see B. Porten, *Cambridge History of Judaism* 1 (Cambridge, 1984), 372–400; E. J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 38–45.

³¹ Ed. pr. E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus u. Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militärkolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig, 1911), 147–82; see also E. Meyer, *Der Papyrusfund von Elephantine* (Leipzig, 1912); the critical re-edition by A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923), 204–48 has now been superseded by B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, Newly Copied, Edited and Translated into Hebrew and English* 3 (Jerusalem, 1993), 22–53. There is also an up-to-date translation (with a good introduction) by J. M. Lindenberger in J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 2 (London, 1985), 479–507. For an excellent account (with a very full bibliography), see J. C. Greenfield, 'The wisdom of Ahiqar' in J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (edd.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge, 1995), 43–52. For an interesting discussion setting the work in a wider Near Eastern literary context, see Stephanie Dalley, 'Assyrian court narratives in Aramaic and Egyptian: historical fiction', in T. Abusch et al. (edd.), *Historiography in the Cuneiform World. Proceedings of the XLV^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, part 1 (CDL 2001), 149–61. On affinities with an Egyptian (New Kingdom) tale, see S. Brock, *JSS* 13 (1968), 212–17. The only other text classifiable as literary from the Elephantine excavation is also a first-person narrative, the Aramaic version of the Bisitun inscription (on which see below, n. 57), with the addition of material from Darius' tomb-inscription (see further N. Sims-Williams, *BSOAS* 44 [1981], 1–7). We might guess that these copies were made with an educational purpose. No Israelite literature was found.

composition of the original work may antedate the preserved fragments by as much as a century; but the interval could be considerably shorter. Although found among the debris of a Jewish community, there is nothing Jewish about this, the earliest surviving literary Aramaic text; it is clearly a polytheistic work, with references to Shamash as the dominant god. Known from post-Christian recensions in many languages (Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Turkish, Georgian, Roumanian, and various Slavonic languages),³² this work has contributed some details to *Tobit* and rather more substantially to the *Life of Aesop* (101–23). It is generally classified as Wisdom literature; Ahikar's story serves as a frame for proverbial advice addressed, in the first place, to his nephew. The Aramaic fragments preserve the first part of the frame story, and a substantial part of the maxims. The former is in Imperial Aramaic (*Reichs-aramäisch*),³³ and contains numerous Akkadian loan words and calques, while the latter is in a dialect of Western Aramaic and is virtually free of Akkadianisms. The difference in dialect can be explained by the difference in genre, and the traditional nature of maxims, which are likely to preserve archaic constructions and vocabulary. Linguistically, then, this is an interesting composite; there is no reason to think that it is a translation.³⁴ The Aramaic narrative, so far as it goes, is more sober and concise than the later recensions and the comparable section of the *Life of Aesop*.³⁵ Soon after the publication of the Aramaic text it was suggested that it was the model for Herodotus' story of Croesus and Cambyses,³⁶ but this idea has been rather disregarded of late.³⁷ I believe it deserves revival.

³² For a synoptic presentation of translations of the Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic texts, see R. H. Charles, in F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and A. S. Lewis (edd.), *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* 2 (Oxford, 1913), 715–84. For fragments of a Demotic version, dated on palaeographical grounds to the first century A.D., see K.-T. Zauzich, 'Demotische Fragmente zum Ahikar-Roman', in H. Franke (ed.), *Folia Rara Wolfgang Voigt . . . dedicata* (Wiesbaden, 1976), 180–5. On the Slavonic versions, see V. Jagić, 'Der weise Akyrios', *ByzZ* 1 (1892), 107–26, who emphasizes the work's extraordinary popularity ('eine Lieblings-lecture AltRußlands'). 'So ist die Weisheit des Achikar für uns das älteste Buch einer durch die verschiedensten Völker und Zungen sich verbreitenden internationalen Weltliteratur' (Meyer [n. 31], 128).

³³ The term has become conventional, but should not be taken to imply the imposition of an official language policy.

³⁴ See further J. C. Greenfield, 'The dialects of early Aramaic', *JNES* 37 (1978), 93–99; id. in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran* 2 (Cambridge, 1985), 706–7. It is not clear how far the dialect difference is a matter of generic convention; the traditional nature of maxims might tend to preserve archaic syntax and vocabulary. I am indebted to Stephanie Dalley for advice on this point. Meyer (n. 31), 111, who well emphasizes that the work was intended for reading aloud to a group, has an interesting discussion of the stylistic difference between the simple, popular narrative and the more intellectually demanding manner of expression employed in Ahikar's maxims.

³⁵ R. Degen in his excellent article on Ahikar (*Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 1 [Berlin, 1977], 53–9), well speaks of 'die typisch orientalische, märchenhafte Ausgestaltung der Rahmenerzählung'.

³⁶ Thus Aly (n. 5), 21: 'Das Motiv von dem gefährdeten, versteckten und wieder befreiten Weisen ist aus dem Achikar auf dem Wege mündlicher Tradition in den Teil der Kroisassage übergegangen, wo dieser die Rolle des Weisen übernimmt.' Ibid. 87: 'Genau so werden Achikar und Aisopos, die sich trotz ihrer Weisheit in Gefahr gebracht haben, verborgen und tauchen zur rechter Zeit wieder auf; es ist das die sicherste Spur im Herodot, daß der Achikarroman für seine Zeit oder die Generation vor ihm als bekannt vorausgesetzt werden muß.' Similarly A.-M. Denis, *Introduction aux pseudepigraphes grecs d'Ancien Testament* (Leiden, 1970), 213, n. 59; B. E. Perry, *Fabula* 3 (1960), 20, n. 45.

³⁷ Surprisingly, it is ignored in a lively Italian debate regarding the extent of Ahikar's fame and influence: see further M. J. Luzzato, 'Grecia e Vicino Oriente: tracce della 'Storia di Ahikar' nella

It may be helpful to provide a summary of the story, which is related in the first person. Ahikar, vizier to Sennacherib, being childless (we are later given reason to infer that he is a eunuch) adopted his sister's son, Nadin, and having trained him appropriately, persuaded the new king, Esarhaddon, to accept the young man as his successor in royal service. But after Ahikar's retirement Nadin contrived his condemnation for treason. Esarhaddon ordered Ahikar's former colleague, Nabusumiskun,³⁸ much against his will, to carry out the execution.³⁹ However, Ahikar reminded Nabusumiskun that he owed him a favour: in the time of Sennacherib he had saved Nabusumiskun from a similar sentence, by hiding him in his own house until the king's wrath had passed, when Sennacherib was delighted to learn that Nabusumiskun was still alive. Nabusumiskun accordingly took into his confidence the two men with him, and persuaded them to kill instead a eunuch slave, whose body could be displayed as evidence that Ahikar had indeed been put to death;⁴⁰ a substantial reward might be expected when the king came to feel the need of Ahikar's counsel. So Nabusumiskun sheltered Ahikar. After this point in the story the Aramaic version is lost. The later recensions relate how the news of Ahikar's death emboldened Assyria's enemies. The king bitterly regretted the loss of his wise counsellor, and Nabusumiskun cautiously seized his opportunity. According to the Syriac version,

He fell down before the king and said to him, 'He who has contemned the commandments of his lord is guilty of death; and I, my lord, have contemned the command of thy kingship. Command, therefore, that they crucify me. For Ahikar, whom thou didst command me to slay, is yet alive.' And when the king heard these words, he answered and said, 'Speak on, speak on, Nabusemakh; speak on, thou good and clever man, unskilled in evil. If it is indeed as thou sayest, and thou show me Ahikar alive, then I will give thee presents of silver, a hundred talents in weight, and of purple, fifty talents in value.' And Nabusemakh answered and said, 'Swear to me, my lord the king, that, if there be not found before thee other sins of mine, this sin shall not be remembered against me.' And the king gave him his right hand on this matter.

Ahikar is rehabilitated, and saves his country; his worthless son is handed over to him, and expires in confinement after suffering a lengthy sermon from Ahikar.⁴¹

cultura greca tra VI e V secolo a.C.', *QS* 36 (1992), 5–81; F. M. Fales, 'Storia di Ahikar tra Oriente e Grecia: la prospettiva dall'antico Oriente', *QS* 38 (1993), 143–66; Luzzato, 'Ancora sulla "Storia di Ahikar"', *QS* 39 (1994), 253–78; Fales, 'Reflessioni sull'Ahikar di Elefantine', *Orientalis Antiqui Miscellanea* 1 (1994), 39–60; id., 'Ahikar e Boccaccio', in E. Acquaro (ed.), *Alla Soglie della Classicità. Il Mediterraneo tra tradizione e innovazione. Studi in onore di Sabatino Moscati* (Rome, 1996), 1.147–67.

³⁸ An official of this name is known to have served Sennacherib: see A. Salvesen in S. Dalley (ed.), *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1998), 147.

³⁹ The readiness with which in the Aramaic version the king accepts Nadin's accusation of subversion is more intelligible if we recall that Sennacherib was murdered by a conspiracy of his sons and that Esarhaddon's accession was surrounded by dynastic struggles. As these events came to be forgotten, a more elaborate stratagem was required.

⁴⁰ The availability of a suitable substitute might be thought providential. This may remind us of an oddity in Herodotus' story of the survival of Cyrus. The herdsman Mitradates is ordered to expose the child in the wildest part of the mountains (1.110.3); rephrasing this instruction to his wife he says *ἐνθα θηριωδέστατον εἴη τῶν ὀρέων* (1.111.3), thus indicating that he expects the child to be eaten (a fitting method of disposing of the corpse for a good Zoroastrian). However, Harpagus' agents will check that his instructions have been fulfilled, and a substitute corpse is necessary; Mitradates' own stillborn child is accordingly taken to the mountains in some sort of container, and retrieved two days later for inspection, and subsequent burial (1.113).

⁴¹ In the later recensions Nadin is subjected to an intensive course of Ahikar's proverbial wisdom by way of preparation for state service; but he is so clearly no advertisement for this form of instruction that such an arrangement of the material cannot be regarded as an improvement.

It is an attractive and coherent story. Ahikar's predicament is treated almost as a regular hazard of state service at a high level; long ago he had taken the risk of rescuing a colleague and can now call for a return of the favour. We may think he is extraordinarily fortunate that the official charged with his execution was under such an obligation to him. Should we see divine forces at work in this stroke of luck, or infer that Ahikar had been good to many of his highly placed colleagues in their misfortunes, believing that he might one day need their help? Probably both. We should note that Ahikar's loyalty is unimpaired by his undeserved suffering. We see too how cautiously Nabusumiskun introduces his report of Ahikar's survival. The hazards of disobedience to the king's commands, however ill-advised, are not to be seen simply as an aspect of Cambyses' madness.

Ahikar's story is not a tale readily transposed to a Greek context. As Aly well put it: 'Der griechische Kulturkreis konnte den Typus des echten Sultans nicht bieten. Die kleinen griechischen Tyrannen sind anders und da, wo sie typisch werden, mit einem anderen Stempel geprägt.'⁴² But the currency of Aramaic as a *lingua franca* would facilitate transmission from one ethnic group to another,⁴³ and the tale could easily be recycled to the Persian court.⁴⁴ The absorption of Ahikar's story into (better, *contaminatio* with) the *Life of Aesop* (101–23) demonstrates the power of a good plot to take on fresh life in a different setting.⁴⁵ This remarkable (almost certainly Hellenistic) cross-fertilization has gained new interest with the publication of the puzzling prosimetric narrative featuring the magus Tinouphis (*PTurner* 8; second century A.D.), which evidently involved the cunning and successful concealment of a condemned sage.⁴⁶ The evident adaptability of *Ahikar's* frame story strongly suggests that the similarities with Herodotus' narrative are unlikely to be coincidental.

⁴² Aly (n. 5), 21.

⁴³ It is likely enough that Herodotus, coming as he did from the fringes of the Persian empire, could at least get by conversationally in Aramaic: see further R. Schmitt, 'Assyria grammata u. ähnliche: Was wüsten die Griechen von Keilschrift?', in C. W. Müller et al. (edd.), *Zum Umgang mit fremden Sprachen in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart, 1992), 21–35; id., 'Die Sprachverhältnisse im Achaimenidenreich', in R. B. Finazzi and P. Tornaghi (edd.), *Lingua e Cultura in contatto nel mondo antico e altomedievale* (Brescia, 1993), 77–102, esp. 81–93.

⁴⁴ Ahikar is found there in an Ethiopian version; see further R. Schneider, 'L'Histoire d'Ahiqar en éthiopien', *Annales d'Éthiopie* 11 (1978), 141–52.

⁴⁵ Meanwhile Ahikar had evidently come to be recognized as a world-class sage, to judge by the inclusion of the title *Ἀκίχαρος* in the catalogue of Theophrastus' works given by Diogenes Laertius (5.50). (But we should not feel much confidence in the claim made by Clement of Alexandria for Democritus as translator of the sage's maxims [*Strom.* 1.15.69; 68B 299DK, *Unechte Fragmente*]; see further Diels ad loc; M. L. West, 'The sayings of Democritus', *CR* 19 [1969], 142.) His peculiar appeal is suggested by his absorption into *Tobit*, where he acquires a new identity as a court Jew; it is assumed that his story is familiar to the reader, and his dealings with his ne'er-do-well nephew provide a foil to the strong family feeling that otherwise pervades the book; see further J. C. Greenfield, 'Ahikar in the Book of Tobit', in M. Carrez, J. Doré, and P. Grelot (edd.), *De la Torah au Messie: Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes à Henri Cazelles* (Paris, 1981), 329–36; M. Marinčić, 'Die Symbolik im Buch Tobit u. der Achikar Roman', *ZAnt* 45 (1995), 199–212. Traces of Ahikar's wisdom have been detected in Proverbs and Psalms; see further E. W. Heaton, *The School Tradition of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1994), 119–20. (An even wider influence would be indicated if the name [A]cīcar—proposed by W. Studemund—were rightly restored in a third-century mosaic in Trier; but see R. W. Daniel, 'Epicharmus in Trier: a note on the Monnus-Mosaic', *ZPE* 114 (1996), 30–6.)

⁴⁶ Published by M. W. Haslam, in *Papyri Greek and Latin, Edited in Honour of Eric Gardener Turner* (London, 1981), 35–45, plate iv. See also R. Kussl, *Papyrusfragmente griechischer Romane* (Tübingen, 1991), 71–2; A. Stramaglia, 'Prosimetria narrativa e "romanzo perduto": *PTurner* 8', *ZPE* 92 (1992), 121–49; R. Kussl, 'Achikar, Tinuphis u. Äsop', in N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der Äsop-Roman: Motivgeschichte u. Erzählstruktur* (Tübingen, 1992), 23–30; S. A. Stephens and

The motif has had a long shelf-life. Travelling in Egypt in 1833, Robert Curzon was told a very similar story about Boghos Bey, the principal minister of Mohammed Ali. Quite unreasonably condemned to death by the Pasha, Boghos was put in a sack, which was loaded onto a donkey, to be thrown into the Nile. Fortunately on the way the party encountered Boghos' old friend, an Armenian merchant by the name of Walmas, who, with the assistance of his servants, rescued his old friend from his unenthusiastic guards.

Boghos was carried off, and concealed in a safe place, and the guards returned to the citadel and reported that they had pitched Boghos into the Nile, where he had sunk, as all should do who disobeyed the commands of his Highness. Some time afterwards the Pasha, overcome by financial difficulties, was heard to say that he wished Boghos was still alive. Walmas, who was present, after some preliminary conversation (for the ground was rather dangerous), said that if his own pardon was ensured, he would mention something respecting Boghos which he was sure would be agreeable to his Highness; and at last he owned that he had rescued him from the guards and had kept him concealed in his house in hopes of being allowed to restore so valuable a servant to his master. The Pasha was delighted at the news, instantly reinstated Boghos in all his former honours, and Walmas himself stood higher than ever in his favour; but the guards were executed for disobedience. Ever since that time Boghos Bey has continued to be the principal minister and most confidential adviser of Mohammed Ali Pasha.⁴⁷

Walmas, 'a shrewd-looking man with one eye', was pointed out to Curzon who, intelligent, widely travelled, and reasonably hard-headed, saw no grounds for scepticism.

But we are fortunately able to read this story at an earlier stage in its development. William Turner, who spent some weeks in Cairo in 1815, several times enjoyed the hospitality of 'Mr Bogos, the dragoman of the Pasha', whom he describes as

certainly the most liberal-minded and agreeable Levantine I know. . . . He has shared the vicissitudes that usually attend the favourite of a capricious despot. He is now in high favour, but he was once put in a sack by the Pasha's order, and on the point of being thrown into the Nile, when a powerful Turk who was his friend, passing by, stopped the executioner, persuaded him to wait till he had spoken to the Pasha, and interceded successfully to save his life.⁴⁸

How much substance there was in this less sensational, but still sufficiently alarming, version I would not like to say; but Herodotus is hardly open to criticism if he accepted as historical what we may see as a migratory motif.

We can only speculate about the circumstances in which *Ahiqar's* frame-story was transferred from the Assyrian to the Persian court. To the Jews of Elephantine the Assyrian empire was part of their history, and the story's setting meaningful. To Greeks, as Herodotus' very inadequate treatment of Assyrian matters indicates,⁴⁹ it

J. J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton, 1995), 400–8; J. R. Morgan, *ANRW* 2.34.4 (Berlin, 1998), 3374–6; Lucia Paruscello, 'Alcune osservazioni critico-testuali in margine a P.Turner 8 (*Tinouphisfragment*)', *ZPE* 134 (2001), 139–44. The parallel with *Ahiqar* appears to have been first noted by G. Anderson, *Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World* (London, 1984), 158.

⁴⁷ R. Curzon, *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* (London, 1849), 64–5.

⁴⁸ W. Turner, *Journal of a Tour in the Levant, 2: Voyage to Syria and Egypt* (London, 1820), 358–9.

⁴⁹ His promise of Ἀσσύριοι λόγοι (1.184) remains unfulfilled (cf. 1.106.2); I suspect he had not finished collecting material. The oddly abrupt opening of his history of Media is tantalizing (1.95.2): Ἀσσυρίων ἀρχόντων τῆς ἀνω Ἀσίας ἐπ' ἔτεα εἴκοσι καὶ πεντακόσια, πρῶτοι ἀπ' αὐτῶν Μῆδοι ἤρξαντο ἀπίστασθαι. The precise figure is rather specious, since no indication of the beginning of Assyrian rule is ever given. See further D. Asheri, *Erodoto, Le Storie, Libro I* (Rome, 1988) on 1.184; R. Rollinger, *Herodots Babylonischer Logos* (Innsbruck, 1993); R. Bichler, *Herodots Welt* (Berlin, 2000), 119–23; A. Kuhrt in E. J. Bakker, I. J. F. de Jong, and H. van Wees, *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden, 2002), 475–96.

was not, and it would be natural in retelling the basic story to a Greek listener to blur the specific details, in particular the barbaric onomastics. Under Persian rule, recycling to fit the Persian court is a natural corollary. I do not suppose Herodotus' own invention contributed much to the process. His narrative is hospitable to stories of ruses and deception⁵⁰ and we might have expected him to develop the story of Croesus' rescue more fully. But for him it is interesting primarily as an illustration of the horrific capriciousness of an insane autocrat: *ποιαῦτα πολλὰ ἐς Πέρσας τε καὶ τοὺς συμμάχους ἐξεμαίνετο* (37.1). Our nineteenth-century British travellers interpreted similarly what they were told of Mr Boghos' vicissitudes.⁵¹ The theme takes on a peculiar piquancy when it is paradoxically transferred to the anti-hero and trickster Aesop, the prototype of the Cynic sage in his successful challenge to conventional values.⁵² But the original sense of the story was surely rather different, the emphasis being on the ultimate success of the wise and loyal courtier, as Hausrath well put it: 'In der Tat, ein "Loblied auf assyrische Vasallentreue", die trübe Weisheit eines vom Geschick verfolgten Mannes, der demütig dem König huldigt, der der Vertreter des Systems ist, unter dem er leidet.'⁵³ Few narratives could so well illustrate the protean quality of what is apparently the same basic story; by slight, and no doubt often unconscious, changes of emphasis successive storytellers adapt the scenario to fit the concerns of their audience.⁵⁴ The point is relevant to the other two stories discussed here, and indeed to much in Herodotus' narrative.

ZOPYRUS' RUSE

The theme of a vassal's extraordinary loyalty, like the autocrat's power of life and death a motif alien to a Greek environment, comes into its own in Herodotus' account (152ff.) of the self-sacrificial devotion of Zopyrus,⁵⁵ son of Megabyxus⁵⁶ (the advocate

⁵⁰ See further M. Dorati, 'Cultura tradizionale e tematiche dell' inganno in Erodoto', *QS* 38 (1993), 65–84.

⁵¹ The cumulative effect of such travellers' tales, at any rate when the travellers were upper-class, well-educated, and worldly-wise, should not be overlooked in considering nineteenth-century European attitudes to the East.

⁵² See further M. W. Haslam, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 53 (London, 1986), 149–72 (on *POxy.* 3720); C. Grotanelli, 'The ancient novel and biblical narrative', *QUCC* n.s. 27 (56) 3 (1987), 7–34; F. R. Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* 1 (Leiden, 1999), 647–85 (where further bibliography may be found). For the author of *Tobit* (n. 45), Ahiqar's zeal in almsgiving is of crucial importance (14.10).

⁵³ A. Hausrath, *Achiqar und Aesop: das Verhältnis der orientalischen zur griechischen Fabeldichtung* (Heidelberg, 1918), 46.

⁵⁴ 'Es ist durch die vergleichende Motivforschung zu einer Binsenwahrheit geworden, daß, wenn zwei dasselbe erzählen, es noch lange nicht dasselbe zu sein braucht' (W. Spanner, 'Das Märchen als Gattung' in F. Karlinger [ed.], *Wege der Märchenforschung* [Darmstadt, 1973], 155–76 at 165).

⁵⁵ Given pride of place among Reinhardt's 'Vasallengeschichten' (n. 4), 349–52. His conclusion deserves attention (352): 'Das Besondere an der Zopyrosgeschichte ist einmal ihre entwickelte erzählerische Technik, die zumal auch in den Dialogen glänzt, vor allem aber ihre Beispielhaftigkeit, da sie ein wahres Muster jenes Treu- und Dienstverhältnisses vor Augen stellt, wofür das griechische Wort "agathoergia" anstatt eines Terminus verwandt wird. Niemand führt bei Herodot dies Wort so gern im Munde wie sein Xerxes. Aber während es in den Geschichten um Dareios für ein ritterliches Treueverhältnis steht, wird es in Xerxes' Munde mehr und mehr zum Anspruch einer Haltung, der die Wirklichkeit nicht mehr entspricht. Derselbe Wandel wird sich uns in den Königsgeschichten wiederholen.'

⁵⁶ Old Persian *Bagabuxsa*. On the Greek form of the name, see J. Wackernagel, *Hermes* 58 (1923), 462–3 (= *Kleine Schriften* 2. 1212–13); E. Benveniste, *Titres et noms propres en Iranien*

of oligarchy in the Constitutional Debate, 153.1). In Zopyrus, loyalty combines with a ruse worthy of Odysseus (though we might think that Odysseus would have been discouraged by a less optimistic calculation of the odds against success) to bring to a successful conclusion the Persian campaign against the rebellious city of Babylon.

The series of massive uprisings with which, according to Darius' own account of events in the Bisitun inscription (*DB* i.16–iv.54),⁵⁷ the reign began are very dimly reflected in Herodotus' mirror.⁵⁸ Darius' records two revolts of Babylon in 522/1, one lasting two and a half and the other three months; in the suppression of the first Darius himself is in command (i.18–ii.20), for the second Intaphrenes (Vidafarna) plays the leading role (iii.49, 50). There is not much in common between this record and Herodotus' account of a twenty-month campaign,⁵⁹ which does not seem to be set near the start of Darius' reign. Between the accession (88) and the revolt of Babylon (150–60), Herodotus gives his account of Darius' organization of the satrapies and corresponding assessment of tribute (89–96), with appendices on India (98–106) and Arabia (107–13), miscellaneous geographical matter (114–7), Intaphrenes' downfall (118–19), two further instalments of Samian affairs culminating in the island's subjugation (120–8, 139–49), and the story of Democedes (129–38), which presents Darius preparing the ground for a campaign in the west, and therefore implies that the existing empire is felt to be stable. We thus form the impression that a considerable time has elapsed since Darius' accession, an impression confirmed by Herodotus' use of the capture of Babylon as a *terminus post quem* for the Scythian campaign (4.1.1).

The narrative proceeds at an unhurried pace. Herodotus sets the scene carefully, describing the Babylonians' thorough preparations (150), beginning already under Smerdis.⁶⁰ The expedient by which they reduce the number of mouths to be fed, by slaughtering *en masse* women judged to be surplus, alienates the sympathy that we might be inclined to feel for freedom fighters. Direct speech lends vividness to a Babylonian's scornful prediction that the city would fall when mules bear young;⁶¹ we may be reminded of the overconfidence that preceded Croesus' downfall (to which, we may remember, he was sped by a prophecy featuring a mule, 1.55–56.1). The extensive

ancien (Paris, 1966), 108–117, where the name is explained as 'qui est au service du dieu' (not 'set free by God' as LSJ), a meaning that accounts for its evolution as a religious title for the priests of Artemis at Ephesus (Xen. *An.* 5.3.4ff., Men. *DE F*5, Strabo 14.1.23, App. *BCiv.* 5.9)

⁵⁷ References are given according to the Persian version: see R. Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great. Old Persian Text* (London, 1991). Asheri (n. 2), appendix 1 includes an annotated translation, with bibliography. The rebels mostly sought to re-establish local independence, claiming legitimacy by family connections with dead rulers; only Vahyazdata in Persis (*DB* iii.40–5), who claimed to be Bardiya, was a pretender to the Achaemenid throne.

⁵⁸ ἄτε οὐδεόντων ἐτι τῶν πρηγμάτων (127.1) hardly conveys any impression of the chain of rebellions that comprises the greater part of Darius' account and the accompanying iconography. The story of Oroetes, the satrap in Sardis (126–8), might be regarded as evidence to the contrary; but unrest in Lydia was not among the problems that Darius saw fit to mention. Darius' significant omissions are pinpointed by R. N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich, 1984), 98–102.

⁵⁹ Christopher Tuplin makes an ingenious attempt to account for Herodotus' figure. Babylon could be said to have rebelled three times, since it recognized the rule of Bardiya and this could retrospectively be regarded as rebellion against Darius; the second of the revolts recorded by Darius' ended in the twenty-first month after Bardiya's accession. A period of intermittent disturbance could thus have been misrepresented (or misunderstood by Herodotus) as a single prolonged act of heroic defection. See further Tuplin, 'Achaemenid arithmetic: numerical problems in Persian history', *Topoi* Suppl. 1 (1997), 365–421 at 392–4.

⁶⁰ Thus their revolt is not, as Darius presents it in the Bisitun inscription, a reaction to the death of the imposter and Darius' own accession.

⁶¹ On this ἀδύνατον, see Pease on Cic. *Div.* 1.36.

use of Aramaic as a *lingua franca* in Herodotus' time should be borne in mind if we find surprising his assumption that Babylonians and Persians can easily make themselves understood to one another. The besiegers' frustration over nineteen months is adumbrated; we do not form any very high opinion of Darius' ability as a military leader (and are thus well prepared for his lack of success in Scythia).⁶² The end to this stalemate comes in the twentieth month, and Zopyrus is introduced with chiasmic formality⁶³ (153.1): *ἐνθαῦτα εἰκοστῷ μηνὶ Ζωπύρῳ τῷ Μεγαβύζου τούτου ὃς τῶν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐγένετο τῶν τὸν μάγον κατελόντων, τούτου τοῦ Μεγαβύζου παιδὶ Ζωπύρῳ ἐγένετο τέρας τόδε*. When the birth of a foal⁶⁴ to one of his baggage mules was reported to him, Zopyrus saw an omen. The Babylonian who used what he supposed to be a picturesque equivalent for 'Never' had, as Zopyrus saw it, spoken more truly than he knew (*σὺν γὰρ θεῷ ἐκείνόν τε εἰπεῖν*)⁶⁵ and the fulfilment of this unintended prediction through one of his own animals meant that he, Zopyrus, was the man to effect the city's fated capture. Having assured himself that Darius put a high value on the capture of Babylon,⁶⁶ he set about making plans. We should note that Zopyrus does not ask what Darius would give the man who could bring a successful end to the siege. He is, it seems, confident that outstanding service will be appropriately recognized (as Herodotus explains, 154.1: *κάρτα γὰρ ἐν [τοῖσι] Πέρσῃσι αἱ ἀγαθοεργαίαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω μεγάλῃ τιμῶνται*⁶⁷), but needs to be sure that Darius is not on the point of abandoning the campaign and will be prepared to support his initiative. Having decided to pose as a defector, he carries out a fearful act of self-mutilation (*ἐν ἐλαφρώ ποιησάμενος ἑωυτόν*), and presents himself to the appalled Darius having cut off his nose and ears, chopped off his hair clumsily, and flogged himself. Again (155) direct speech adds vividness to the scene, as Darius expresses his horror at what the young nobleman has done.⁶⁸ Zopyrus outlines his scheme, to pose as a deserter with a grievance against the king, to whom he will attribute the injuries he has suffered. He is confident that he will easily persuade the Babylonians to appoint him to a position of command. (We might think that this is wildly over-optimistic, but should remember that Zopyrus is convinced that he has been divinely singled out to receive the message that Babylon's capture is imminent.) He instructs Darius to offer battle after ten days with a force of 1,000 men who will be no great loss (*τῆς μηδεμίας ἔσται ὥρη ἀπολλυμένης*); they are to be armed only with

⁶² We would get a more positive picture if the incorporation of India within the empire had been related.

⁶³ To which Stein (ad loc.) rightly draws attention, though I doubt his inference that an alternative tradition is implied.

⁶⁴ *βρέφος* (cf. 1.111.5) looks poetic, as does *μόρσιμον* (154.1), but we do not know enough about ordinary Ionic usage to judge the register of the many items of Herodotean vocabulary otherwise attested only in verse.

⁶⁵ Cf. 1.86.3. On *φήμη* (153.2), see Dunbar on Ar. *Birds* 720; T. Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford, 2000), 128–9. Herodotus no doubt assumed that all sensible people held similar ideas about the prophetic potential of chance utterances: cf. John 11.49–52.

⁶⁶ *ἀπεπνθάνετο*: the unusual compound. should be noted, as should the tense, implying repeated enquiry.

⁶⁷ Abstract expression has an elevating effect. *ἀγαθοεργία* (cf. 160.1) appears to be Herodotus' own coinage. *ἐς τὸ πρόσω μεγάλῃ* is puzzling, but is probably best taken as 'on an ascending scale of magnitude, according to their importance'; see further J. E. Powell, *CQ* 29 (1935), 155. The Persian king's role as the fountain of honour interested Herodotus: cf. 8.85.3 (on *δροσάγγης*, see R. Schmitt, *Dichtung u. Dichtersprache in indo-germanischer Zeit* [Wiesbaden, 1967], 74); 8.90 (scribes record the names of trierarchs who do distinguished service at Salamis). 'The man who strove for my (royal) house, him I treated well' says Darius (*DB* iv.63).

⁶⁸ *ἐξέπλωσας τῶν φρενῶν* (cf. 6.12.3): an unlikely image in Darius' mouth.

daggers. Seven days later a force of 2,000 should similarly be sent into battle, and twenty days after that a force of 4,000.⁶⁹ The Babylonians, elated by the series of victories thus to be foreseen, may be expected to give Zopyrus supreme command and, in particular, the means to open the gates of Babylon to the crack Persian troops whom Darius should send into battle on the twentieth day after the third defeat. Having issued his instructions, Zopyrus leaves, without waiting for Darius' approval; we should note that he has not revealed the omen which led him to think that Babylon's fall was imminent and that he was the man to bring it about. Autocracy has not stifled his initiative.⁷⁰ All goes according to plan; in due course he is made *στρατάρχης* and *τειχοφύλαξ*⁷¹ (157.4), and is thus able to open the gates to the Persian force. His extraordinary services to the state are recognized (though a nice use of polar expression produces a slight illogicality) (160.1):

Ζωπύρου δὲ οὐδεὶς ἀγαθοεργίην Περσέων ὑπερεβάλετο παρὰ Δαρείῳ κριτῇ, οὔτε τῶν ὕστερον γενομένων οὔτε τῶν πρότερον, ὅτι μὴ Κύρος μόνος . . . ἐτίμησε δὲ μιν μεγάλως· καὶ γὰρ δῶρά οἱ ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ἐδίδου ταῦτα τὰ Πέρσῃσι ἔστι τιμιώτατα καὶ τῇν Βαβυλωνίαν οἱ ἀτελέα νέμεσθαι μέχρι τῆς ἐκείνου ζόης⁷² καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἐπέδωκε.

In the first part of this story Herodotus' audience must have recognized motifs familiar from the Trojan Cycle. Zopyrus' self-mutilation recalls Odysseus' disguise as a maltreated beggar (admittedly, a much less drastic procedure), which he adopted as cover for the intelligence-gathering mission that Helen recalls in the *Odyssey* (4.244ff.). The story was told more fully in the *Little Iliad*, where, according to Proclus' summary, it directly followed Epeius' construction of the Wooden Horse. The episode was popular enough to receive burlesque treatment by Epicharmus (*Odysseus automolos* F97–103 PCG); Aristotle (*Poet.* 23.1459b6) mentions *πτωχεία* among the subjects of tragedies afforded by the *Little Iliad*.⁷³ For the feigned deserter we have a prototype in Sinon, who probably appeared in the *Little Iliad* as well as in the *Iliou Persis*, where his role is mentioned by Proclus.⁷⁴ It is a very reasonable guess that Virgil was indebted to tragedy for his presentation of Sinon.⁷⁵ Both tales turn on the theme of clever Greek outwitting stupid barbarian; it is fascinating to observe this transplanted to a Persian context.⁷⁶ Yet we notice a non-Hellenic trait in the extent of Zopyrus' self-mutilation, which is motivated by its use as a standard Persian punishment (69.5). The narrative is linked with Herodotus' own day by the concluding sentence (160.2): *Ζωπύρου δὲ τούτου γίνεται Μεγάβυξος, ὃς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἀντία Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν συμμάχων ἐστρατήγησε· Μεγάβύξου δὲ τούτου γίνεται Ζώπυρος, ὃς ἐς Ἀθήνας ἡντομόλησε ἐκ Περσέων.* Many have drawn the inference that Zopyrus' homonymous grandson was the source of this narrative,⁷⁷ but it is surely

⁶⁹ A nice example of the 'incremental triple' favoured by Herodotus.

⁷⁰ Contrast Hippocrates' view of the psychological effect of life under this form of government (*Aer.* 16).

⁷¹ Again, this looks like a Herodotean coinage.

⁷² Cf. 1.192.

⁷³ Cf. Eur. *Hec.* 239–41, *Rhes.* 503ff.

⁷⁴ But Aristotle's reference (loc. cit.) to a Sinon play among subjects offered by the *Little Iliad* is probably a later addition.

⁷⁵ Perhaps to Sophocles' *Laocoon*; see further Radt on F542–4; M. Campbell, *A Commentary on Quintus Smyrnaeus Posthomerica XII* (Leiden, 1981), 119–26.

⁷⁶ C. Tuplin draws attention to Polyaeus' story (7.12) of Darius and Siraces, and notes Iranian literary parallels in accounts of the war of the Hephthalites against Peroz; see further E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia* (London, 1902), 1.121, E. Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3 (Cambridge, 1983), 1.401.

⁷⁷ It has been suggested that residence among Greeks had led Zopyrus to translate (rather than

significant that Herodotus makes no such claim (and his words could just as well be taken as a warning against a possibly bogus asylum-seeker).⁷⁸ In view of the improbabilities of this narrative (contrast the infinitely more plausible account of Sextus Tarquinius' role in the capture of Gabii as related by Livy [1.53–4] and Dionysius of Halicarnassus [4.53–8]⁷⁹), it is rather surprising that many scholars have endorsed Wells's suggestion that Zopyrus was the main source of Herodotus' information about Persian affairs.⁸⁰ Apparently Zopyrus' credentials were not examined more closely for lack of alternative proposals. Lewis robustly stated the objection, that 'the story for which he would be the most obvious source, his grandfather's services in the recapture of Babylon (III.150–160), appears on the face of it to be a pack of lies'.⁸¹ Apart from the discrepancies from the Bisitun inscription he points out 'that there is no Babylonian evidence that grandfather Zopyros was ever governor of Babylon' and 'that the kind of thing which Herodotus says about the fate of Babylon seems to fit much better what happened to Babylon in the early years of Xerxes'. Lewis appears to have thought the narrative's other improbabilities too obvious to deserve comment. *ψευδοίμην αἰώντος ἃ κεν πεπίθοιεν ἀκούην*. Since Lewis's survey of Greek–Persian contacts, it has been generally accepted that Herodotus' informants were far more various⁸² (though, of course, Herodotus might have heard stories about Zopyrus' family during his time in Samos: see 4.43.7).⁸³ If we like the idea of the younger Zopyrus (or his Hellenized offspring) romancing about his grandfather's exploits, we had better abandon any support for his candidacy as a reliable source of information on Persian matters.

In this narrative heavy casualties among men sent into battle virtually defenceless are treated as not worth discussion.⁸⁴ Herodotus takes it for granted that the Persian high command has immense numbers at its disposal, and that the quality of the troops is, in general, low.⁸⁵ More disconcerting is the way in which appalling physical

transliterate) his name (and that of his grandfather), a step which would indicate a remarkable degree of Hellenization on the part of a Persian noble (see further Balbina Bähler, *Fleissige Thrakerinnen u. wehrhafte Skythen: Nichtgriechen im klassischen Athen u. ihre archäologische Hinterlassenschaft* [Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998], 102, 123–4, on Greek translations of Phoenician names). But no name of similar meaning is attested in Old Iranian, and it is very much more likely that Zopyrus represents an Iranian name for which Greeks created a false etymology, much on the lines of Zoroastres, 'Pure star' for Iranian Zarathustra 'having old camels'. I am indebted to Elizabeth Tucker for help on this point.

⁷⁸ 'Herodot liebte solche halb verhüllten Pointen: so der Großvater, und so der Enkel' (Reinhardt [n. 4], 351).

⁷⁹ See further T. Köves-Zulauf, 'Die Eroberung von Gabii u. die literarische Moral der römischen Annalistik', *WJA* 13 (1987), 121–47.

⁸⁰ J. Wells, *JHS* 27 (1907), 37–47 = *Studies in Herodotus* (Oxford, 1923), 95–111. R. A. Ghimadeyev, 'A possible Persian source for Thucydides' description of the first Athenian expedition to Egypt', *VDI* 163,1 (1983), 106–111 (Russian, with English summary) has argued for Zopyrus as Thucydides' source in 1.104, 109–10.

⁸¹ Lewis (n. 7), 105–6; see also R. Rollinger, 'Überlegungen zu Herodot, Xerxes und dessen angeblicher Zerstörung Babylons', *Altorientalische Forschungen* 25 (1998), 339–73, esp. 347–9. It is not clear whether we should see a reflection of the impression made by Herodotus' narrative in the phrase *Ζωπύρου τάλαντα* quoted from Cratinus' *Pylaea* (F187 K-A); even more perplexing is the title of Strattis' *Zopyros Perikaïomenos* (F9 K-A).

⁸² See also M. C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge, 1997), 3–133.

⁸³ Cf. D. Hegyi, *AntHung* 21 (1973), 83–5.

⁸⁴ Xenophon no doubt took this episode as his model for a stratagem of Cyrus'; but Cyrus' men merely suffer interrogation under torture (*Cyr.* 5.3.16).

⁸⁵ On Persian faith in numbers, cf. (admittedly, in a rather different context) 1.136.1, τὸ πολλὸν

mutilation is depicted as a routine reaction by a superior to an inferior who has displeased him (cf. 118.2). Zopyrus has no difficulty in convincing the Babylonians that his injuries result from what Darius judged to be defeatism (156.2 *παθεῖν δὲ ταῦτα διότι συμβουλευσαι οἱ ἀπανιστάναί τὴν στρατιήν, ἐπεῖτε δὴ οὐδεὶς πόρος ἐφαίνετο τῆς ἀλώσιος*). These injuries are not judicial punishments, inflicted after due deliberation,⁸⁶ or the exemplary penalties deemed appropriate to the ringleaders of rebellion such as Darius boasts of meting out to the Median pretenders, Phraortes and Tritantaechmes (but not to any of the other rebel leaders), before impaling them (*DB* ii.32, 33). All this looks like anti-Persian sensationalism.

But we ought not to discount some curiously positive aspects to this tale. Zopyrus takes a terrific risk; the Babylonians might have believed his story but seen no reason to give him any responsibilities (leave alone supreme command). His success against such odds shows that heaven (which sponsored the prophetic omen) is on his (and the Persian) side. We should, too, be impressed by the extraordinary loyalty to the regime demonstrated by Zopyrus' story, as, too, by that of Prexaspes, under Cambyses' thankless rule. These courtiers are not noble savages, nor has life at a despot's court deprived them of initiative; they are clever, steadfast, and self-controlled.⁸⁷ In their dedication to the preservation of the empire, expressed in their loyal service to its ruler, they have no counterparts among the major Greek figures in Herodotus' work. Like the books of Ahiqar, Daniel, and Esther, these narratives illustrate the vicissitudes of high position at court, but the rewards and satisfactions of service to the state look rather questionable when presented from the standpoint of those who failed to find self-evident the advantages in the strong, centralized rule without which the empire would have disintegrated into lawless and unstable tribalism.⁸⁸ To the Greeks, dedication to the imperial ideal appeared to involve the distortion of normal values.

INTAPHRENES' WIFE'S CHOICE

As we have seen, the man who deserved the credit for suppressing the (second) revolt of Babylon was, according to Darius, Intaphrenes (Vidafarna) (*DB* iii.49–50), who heads the list of those who joined in assassinating the usurper (iv.68), though in

δ' ἡγέεται ἰσχυρὸν εἶναι. Notoriously, Herodotus provides an impossibly inflated figure for the force that Xerxes led against Greece (7.184–6); see further Tuplin (n. 59), 366–73. We might wonder whether it was a common (and probably not unfounded) Greek belief that Persian strategists were prepared to contemplate a far higher casualty rate than would have been acceptable to a city-state. Darius wastes no words on casualties among his own men in the Bisitun inscription; totals for those killed and taken captive in the rebel armies are recorded in the Babylonian and Aramaic versions, but not in the Elamite and Persian texts.

⁸⁶ Contrast the explanation for the earless condition of the bogus Smerdis (3.69.5): τοῦ δὲ μάγου τούτου τοῦ Σμέρδιος Κῦρος ὁ Καμβύσεω ἄρχων ἀπέταμε ἐπ' αἰτίῃ δὴ τινι οὐ σμικρῇ. But on the Bisitun relief the imposter's left ear was clearly visible at the beginning of this century, and this penal mutilation looks like a Greek invention: see further S. R. West, in M. A. Flower and M. Toher (edd.), *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell*. *BICS Suppl.* 58 (1991), 176–81. The deterrent effect of such mutilation was important. Xenophon (*An.* 1.9.13) commends the effectiveness of the younger Cyrus' tough measures against crime, noting that along busy roads men could be seen lacking feet, hands, and eyes (and thus reduced to beggary). Similar approval of punitive mutilation as the hallmark of good government is indicated in a conversation recorded by Gertrude Bell from her travels in Mesopotamia in 1909, *Amurath to Amurath* (London, 1911), 95.

⁸⁷ Of course our view of the type is strongly influenced by the devious Harpagus of Book 1.

⁸⁸ Such as Herodotus supposed to be the condition of the Medes on gaining independence from Assyria, before the establishment of a monarchy (1.96.2, 97.2).

Herodotus' account of the conspiracy he is not a leading figure. The story of his downfall (118–19) αὐτίκα μετὰ τὴν ἐπανάστασιν is related, in isolation from the main narrative of Persian history, between an ethnographic digression related to imperial administration and a section on Samian affairs.⁸⁹ According to Herodotus, Intaphrenes' precipitate reaction to what he supposed to be unjustified interference with his hard-won privilege of direct access to the king unless the latter was in bed with a woman (cf. 84.2) and his appalling treatment of the officials charged with maintaining the proper formalities (118.2 σπασάμενος τὸν ἀκινάκεια ἀποτάμνει αὐτῶν τὰ τε ὦτα καὶ τὰς ῥίνας) led Darius to suspect that the other six conspirators had banded together to topple him in turn. Having satisfied himself that none of the others was in fact involved, he arrested Intaphrenes and his kin and sentenced them to death (119.2).

The story so far presents the Persian élite, and particularly Darius, in a most unfavourable light. The king is occupied in the harem at an hour when he might reasonably be expected to be available for business. Exotic brutality is nothing out of the way: Intaphrenes inflicted savage and humiliating mutilation on men conscientiously doing their duty. But whatever punishment might be appropriate for him, any charge against his kin is (as Herodotus tells the story) a figment of Darius' suspicious imagination, and could not have been upheld in any proper trial. What has happened to the royal judges (οἱ βασιλῆιοι δικάσταί) and the lawcode of which we heard under Cambyses (31, cf. 5.25), not to mention the alleged principle of royal sentencing policy whereby a man's services were set against his offences?⁹⁰ Otanes' objection that a monarch kills men without trial (80.5) is not refuted by the new regime. If Darius proceeded thus (or even gave the impression that he did), he was asking for trouble.

For Herodotus, the main interest of the episode lies in the initiative taken by Intaphrenes' wife, whose constant lamentation moves the king to pity (119.3).⁹¹ Offered a reprieve for any one of her condemned kin, she surprises Darius by choosing her brother, ἀλλοτριώτερός τοι τῶν παίδων καὶ ἥσσον κεχαρισμένος τοῦ ἀνδρός. From Darius' request that she explain her reasoning, we see that her husband, the ringleader of this alleged plot, was not excluded from pardon. Her explanation is familiar: husband and children are replaceable, but since her parents are dead, she cannot have another brother. Darius is pleased by her reply and she wins a further concession, the life of her eldest son, but the others (we are not told how many) are all executed.

⁸⁹ The recent discussion by Alan Griffiths in Nino Luraghi (ed.), *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford, 2001), 173–7, brings out interesting links between this episode and the preceding chapter on Persian water policy (117). (It would probably be wishful thinking to see in this fantasy a distorted reference to the network of underground irrigation canals [*qanat/kariz*] which according to Polybius [10.28] was already established under the Achaemenids; see further P. Briant, 'Polybe x.28 et les qanats: la témoignage et ses limites' in id. [ed.], *Irrigation et drainage dans l'antiquité. Qanats et canalisations souterraines en Iran, en Égypte et en Grèce* [Paris, 2001], 15–40.)

⁹⁰ See above, n. 27. There is a nice balancing of praise and blame in Darius' letter to Gadatas (R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* [Oxford, 1989²], no. 12).

⁹¹ φοιτώσα ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας: cf. 117.5 στάντες κατὰ τὰς θύρας τοῦ βασιλέως βοῶσι ὠρνόμενοι; 120.2; Xen. *An.* 1.9.3–4, *Cyr.* 8.8.13, *Daniel* 2.49, *Esther* 2.21; 6.10, 12; it is clear from Xenophon's use of the phrase that this is a general designation for the court, not just for part of the palace buildings, and should not be taken to imply that Intaphrenes' wife had to remain outside the palace: see further LSJ s.v. *θύρα* 2; H. P. Rüger, "Das Tor des Königs"—der königliche Hof", *Biblica* 50 (1969), 247–50. The conception survived in the European designation of the Ottoman government as the *Sublime Porte*.

This story has something in common with Solon's exchange with Croesus when the well-travelled Athenian is asked who, in his judgement, is the happiest of men (1.30.2), *εἴ τινα ἤη πάντων εἶδες ἀλβιώτατον*. Like Darius, but less happily, Croesus is surprised by the answer he gets: *ἀποθωμάσας δὲ Κροῖσος τὸ λεχθὲν εἶρετο ἐπιστρεφέως*. It is by her sophistically clever answer that Intaphrenes' wife wins from Darius a further concession.⁹²

This chapter has been the focus of concentrated scholarly attention because of its relationship to the passage in which Sophocles' Antigone defends her commitment to Polynices with similar reasoning (*Ant.* 904–20). Goethe cherished the hope that some competent scholar would prove these lines to be an interpolation, but certainly nowadays few argue against their authenticity.⁹³ There seems to be general agreement that Antigone's speech is indebted to Herodotus, not vice versa,⁹⁴ there are other indications in the *Antigone* that Sophocles was indebted to this part of Herodotus' work⁹⁵

However, we should not focus on these two texts in isolation. Over a century ago scholars drew attention to Indian⁹⁶ and medieval Persian⁹⁷ examples of a more coherent version of the tale,⁹⁸ in which there are just three men condemned—husband, brother, and son—and the woman's unexpected response wins a reprieve for all three. Although these stories are first attested later than Herodotus, this more economical scenario looks primary; the narrative is much less satisfactory when a larger group is involved.⁹⁹ Moreover, it would be quite irrational for Darius to contemplate sparing the man he regards as the ringleader of a conspiracy extensive enough to include his brother-in-law while executing the other suspects. His decision to spare Intaphrenes' eldest son does more credit to his heart than his head; it is hard to imagine a more

⁹² ἡσθεῖς αὐτῇ: her unexpected response satisfies a taste for paradox, cf. 34.5.

⁹³ See, however, C. W. Müller, 'Die thebanische Trilogie des Sophokles u. ihre Aufführung im Jahre 401. Zur Frühgeschichte der antiken Sophoklesrezeption u. der Überlieferung des Textes', *RhM* 139 (1996) 193–224.

⁹⁴ As Mark Griffith well puts it (*Sophocles, Antigone* [Cambridge, 1999], ad loc.), 'Antigone's hypothetical choice as to which dead family member she might bury (when no others in fact exist) is obviously more far-fetched than the real choice in Herodotus of which one to save from death.'

⁹⁵ See further S. West 'Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herodotus Book Three', in Jasper Griffin (ed.), *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford, 1999), 109–36.

⁹⁶ C. W. Tawney, 'A folk-lore parallel', *The Indian Antiquary* 10 (1881), 370–1; R. Pischel, 'Zu Sophokles Antigone 909–912', *Hermes* 28 (1893), 465–8.

⁹⁷ G. Nöldeke, *Hermes* 29 (1894), 155–6.

⁹⁸ See further *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 2 (Berlin, 1979), 861–4 (U. Masing). R. S. P. Beekes, '“You can get new children . . .”: Turkish and other parallels to ancient Greek ideas in Herodotus, Thucydides, Sophocles and Euripides', *Mnemos.* 39 (1986), 225–39; J. M. Bremmer, 'Why did Medea kill her brother?', in J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (edd.), *Medea: Essays in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art* (Princeton, 1997), 83–100, esp. 97–99; for some parallels from later Iranian literature, see C. J. Tuplin, 'Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*: education and fiction', in A. H. Sommerstein and C. Atherton (edd.), *Education in Greek Fiction* (Bari, 1997), 64–163 at 128–9. We need to distinguish cases where there is felt to be something paradoxical about the woman's choice (as with Intaphrenes' wife) from those that apparently illustrate a norm (as in Edith Durham's account of Albania in the early twentieth century, where the story which she tells to illustrate the point concerns a woman's murder of her husband and children to avenge her brother (*High Albania* [London, 1909], 91–3); see also A. Goodrich-Freer [Mrs H. H. Spoer], *Arabs in Tent and Town* [London, 1924], 25).

⁹⁹ How and Wells's note demonstrates an aversion to admitting Near Eastern influence on Greek literature rather characteristic of their time; against Nöldeke's view that both Herodotus' story and the Indian one derive from an older Persian original it is urged that 'the more natural view is that a piece of Greek cleverness has been borrowed in the East'.

powerful motive for regicide than the desire to avenge a father unjustly executed. Herodotus' Cyrus knew better (1.155.1).¹⁰⁰

How much historical substance can we safely assume? Has Herodotus underestimated a serious crisis? How could he be as confident as he appears to be that Intaphrenes was not plotting treachery? That implies a special source; Intaphrenes' line had been allowed to continue and family tradition might be invoked (but why did Herodotus not cite it explicitly?). Intaphrenes' loyalty was clearly beyond suspicion when Darius dispatched him to put down the second Babylonian insurrection (*DB* iii.50). No reason was apparently seen to remove his name from honourable mention when the addition of the Scythian Skunkha to the contingent of conquered kings made it necessary to engrave the Elamite text for a second time below the Babylonian version. Did Darius miss an opportunity for *dammatio memoriae*?¹⁰¹

The story of Intaphrenes' wife has proved surprisingly attractive to historians, though at the cost of ignoring Herodotus' belief that Intaphrenes was guilty only of grievous bodily harm to palace officials.¹⁰² It has been thought to offer evidence for an otherwise unattested act of revolt (or suspected revolt) and the summary procedure deemed appropriate for dealing with it (apparently without regard for judicial forms), for a change in the character of Darius' regime and curtailment of privileges initially granted to the nobility, and an indication of the status and scope for independent action allowed to noble Persian women. While admitting the need to explain how the story came to be attached to Intaphrenes if he remained consistently loyal, I think we should be cautious.

In the medieval Persian version of the story it is related by Prince Marzuban, who has been accused by the vizier of his brother, the king of Tabaristan, of plotting to secure the throne for himself. Marzuban concludes: 'I have related this legend in order that you, O king, may know that the revolution of fortune's wheel could grant me no person who could replace you, and that I have no desire beyond your continued existence for the preservation of my happiness.'¹⁰³ Darius had a very competent brother, known to the Greeks as Artaphrenes, whom he made satrap of Sardis (5.25.1); we might think that this other son of Hystaspes would pose a more obvious threat to Darius' rule than Intaphrenes, and that he might have been associated with the story before Prince Marzuban. For Greeks, Artaphrenes and Intaphrenes were easily confused (as Aeschylus' account of the assassination of Mardos/Smerdis/Bardiya [*Pers.* 775–7] indicates).

CONCLUSION

These three stories all involve migratory motifs,¹⁰⁴ and their adaptation to the context

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Cypria* F 32 Bernabé, 25 Davies: *νήπιος ὃς πατέρα κτείνας υἱοῦς καταλείπει* (a much quoted line); Hdt. 1.155.1; Eur. *Andr.* 519–21.

¹⁰¹ M. A. Dandamaev supposes that the relevant part of the inscription was inaccessible even for Darius (*Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden* [Wiesbaden, 1976], 75). But Lieutenant (afterwards Major-General Sir) Henry Rawlinson had no special equipment when he studied the inscription in the mid-nineteenth century (and even managed to make paper squeezes); deleting a few unwanted phrases should have been easy enough. Unfortunately the relevant part of the text is not preserved in the Aramaic version, in which corrigenda could easily have been inserted.

¹⁰² See further M. A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, trans. W. J. Vogelsang (Leiden, 1989), 108–9; Briant (n. 8), 143–4 (ignoring the survival of Intaphrenes' eldest son); Kuhrt (n. 8), 687; Maria Brosius, *Women in Ancient Persia* (Oxford, 1996), 109–10.

¹⁰³ *The Tales of Marzuban*, trans. from the Persian by Reuben Levy (London, 1959), 16–18.

¹⁰⁴ This is not the place to discuss how far later examples of these motifs might be indebted to Herodotus; but the possibility should not be overlooked.

of Achaemenid history entails some implausibility and/or weakens the narrative structure. Recontextualization inevitably brings a change of emphasis, and Herodotus is more concerned about context than about consistency.¹⁰⁵ These tales should not be treated as precious nuggets of Persian history thinly overlaid with a Greek veneer. They may at times include authentically Persian elements, but such features are more likely to represent long-lasting features of Oriental autocracy as viewed by its subjects or by outsiders than anything distinctively Achaemenid. Herodotus had no reason to ask whether similar tales had been told of the rulers of Egypt or Assyria, while the authoritative manner in which he has integrated such material into his continuous historical narrative disarms our scepticism.

The appeal of such tales may distract us from the comparative scarcity of information about the more significant achievements of the kings concerned. We have seen that Herodotus' account of Cambyses' reign begins only after the conquest of Egypt. Similarly, Darius' extension of the empire to northern India is simply treated as a *fait accompli*: we first see Indians participating in Darius' colloquium on funerary practice (38.4), where their presence seems to imply that they are already Darius' subjects, and the next we hear of India is as the final province in Herodotus' list of the empire's administrative and fiscal districts (94.2). It is an important aspect of Herodotus' art that our attention is very effectively distracted from the gaps in his information. But there is an undeniable tension between the prominence afforded to anecdotes and migratory plots, on the one hand, and, on the other, the resolutely scientific approach to matters of current intellectual debate. 'Herodotus . . . is good and bad on no fixed system; it is part of his charm'.¹⁰⁶ Of course, much depends on what we mean by 'good' and 'bad'.

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¹⁰⁵ As Vivienne Gray well notes (*Brill's Companion to Herodotus* [n. 49], 314).

¹⁰⁶ N. Whatley, *JHS* 84 (1964), 129.